The McHenry County Historcial Society's Quarterly Newsletter SPRING 2025 – ISSUE 181

Know Your Roads

by Robert Frenz

The American road has been celebrated in our lexicon, lore, legend, books, movies, and song. Consider, for example, the recent use of terms such as "road trip," "road rage," "road hog," the "open road," or "road warriors." Jack Kerouac in the 1950's wrote of a free-wheeling lifestyle in *On the Road*. In the 1970's, Willie Nelson sang of being "On the Road Again," and John Denver sang of "Country Roads." Route 66, built in the 1920's, claimed the moniker, "the Mother Road" in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. A late 1950's, early 1960's television show with the title "Route 66" cemented that highway's reputation in the memories of a new generation - ironically, as a new interstate system was being built to replace it. Today, people come from all over the world to drive the "mother road" and next year marks the centennial of its construction in 1926. One of my favorite authors, William Least Heat-Moon, extolled the pleasures of traveling the *Blue Highways,* thus avoiding those monotonous interstates. There was even a magazine published in the 2010's entitled "American Road." And, our penchant for building roads has even given birth to a new science - Road Ecology: more on this later.

1. Trivia Question -
Who sang "Get Your Kicks on Rt. 66?"
Answer on page 15.

2. Trivia Question-
Where does Rt. 66 begin?
Answer on page 15.

Earliest Roads

The earliest roads in America were, of course, little more than deer paths or Indian trails. The favored road wasn't

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McHenry County Historical Society
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Our Mission Statement
We engage and educate current and future generations for preserving and sharing McHenry County History.

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Thanks for Being a Member!

President's Column

Know Your Buildings

by Robert Frenz

With all the changes taking place at MCHS I thought it might be helpful to use this column - and the next several - to inform our members of the history and uses of our various buildings.

1870 Union School

When the McHenry County Historical Society was organized in 1963, artifacts donated for the collection were housed in Woodstock. Leaders of the nascent Society searched for a number of years to find a permanent home for our organization and its growing collection. The closure of the old two-story Union School in 1968 presented just such an opportunity. The Society purchased the building at public auction - board member Everett Thomas bidding for MCHS - in 1971 for $20,000, with founder Dorothy McEachren putting up the money. Built in 1870 of limestone quarried near Garden Prairie and at a cost of about $8,000 (over $200,000 in today's money) the structure provided 3,602 square feet of space.

Originally, the school consisted of two classrooms on each level. In addition to the eight grades, a high school operated here from 1897 to the late 1910's. Electricity was brought to the building in 1915 and washrooms were added in 1926. This 1971 purchase also included ten city lots, each 33' by 120,' between Washington St. and Johnson St. At the time of purchase the building was in very poor condition with a leaking roof, broken windows, and a ceiling that was "shot." The Board of Directors estimated repairs and renovations to cost over $52,000. Five years passed before the Society and its new Museum hosted a Grand Opening on July 4, 1976 - the nation's Bicentennial.

North Addition

The first addition to the 1870 building came in 1928 with a 2,564 square foot, two-story structure to the north. Constructed with plaster walls and ceiling, this structure housed one classroom on each floor. Later, the downstairs space was used as a music room. With this additional space all classes moved out of the 1870 school. There, a gym and stage were built on the second floor and the lower level housed a library. Today, this north addition provides storage space on the second floor and contains our research library on the first level. Early programs, such as the Sampler Series, and board meetings were held in what is now the library. A partial basement also offers the possibility of additional storage.

Gymnasium

In 1948, the voters approved the construction of a one-story, 7,040 square foot gymnasium to the east of the 1928 addition. With a concrete slab floor and asphalt tile, this space accommodated PE classes and athletic events. At the south end of the gym the wooden stage with maple floor hosted plays, concerts, and graduation ceremonies. Today, what we now call Eckert Hall houses much of our collection and many of our exhibits. And, occasionally, music can still be heard coming from the old stage.

For more information on these buildings and their uses please see my interview with Nancy Fike in Tracers #178 and 179. And, be sure to sign up for one of our many new programs or just stop by to see the vast changes and improvements to our museum. We are now open year around, Tuesday through Saturday. ◆

(To be continued in the next Tracer)

Spinning Wheels

Flax spinning wheel distaff

Weavers, Spinners, and Women's History

by Siobhan Heraty - MCHS Curator

The McHenry County Historical Society's new exhibit, "Weavers & Spinners: Usable Textiles in McHenry County," opened on April 26th. This exhibit dives into the history of textile and clothing production, the ways in which early McHenry County residents produced textiles from materials found on their own land, the once commonplace skills and professions that developed around textile production, the shift to ready-made clothes in the late 19th century, and the resurgence of interest in the textile and fiber arts in the 21st century.

Exhibits are, in my opinion, the most fun part of being a curator. The day-to-day duties of a curator call for the organizational and analytical skills required to manage and care for the thousands of artifacts under our care. But curatorial work does involve some creativity through exhibit development. Exhibits allow curators to take on the role of the historian as a storyteller, utilizing the material culture held in our collections to act as primary sources that tell the story of McHenry County and give the public the opportunity to connect with the past.

There is always content that winds up on the cutting room floor of every exhibit, for one reason or another. While "Weavers & Spinners" touches on the intersection of the textile arts with women's history, there is a deeper story to be told than space in the Anderson Gallery allowed.

To tell the story of weaving, spinning, and textile production is to tell the story of women. Even in ancient times, textile production was commonly associated with women. In Homer's *Odyssey,* Odysseus' wife Penelope spends her days weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law (and her nights undoing her work to buy time for Odysseus to return from the Trojan War), claiming that she will remarry once she finishes the shroud.

In more recent centuries, the intersection between textile history and women's history is best illustrated through the terms whose origins can be traced to women's role in textile production.

"Coverture" is a term that was originally used for coverlet or quilt in old English. On a bed, linens lay beneath the coverlet or quilt. Household linens, including coverlets, were traditionally among the moveable property that women were allowed to own. Moveable property constituted a woman's inheritance from her father, which she received upon her marriage as a dowry. A woman's moveable goods, which could move with her from her father's home to her husband's, could include livestock, furniture, and other household goods like textiles. Her brothers received their inheritance, usually land or money, upon their father's death.

Over time, the term coverture evolved to describe the laws that stated a woman was "covered" by her father's or husband's legal identity just as a coverlet covers the bedlinens. Under coverture, a woman was an extension of her father or husband and therefore not considered an individual person under the law. Coverture laws prevented women from owning property, signing contracts, reaching

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Vintage coverlet and loom

back over the course of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Household linens, produced by women and belonging to women, were one area in which women left their mark in the historical record even under the coverture laws that denied them individual legal personhood. Women often embroidered their names or initials on household linens, thus ensuring that their names were remembered. When these linens wind up in museum collections, they serve as the "written" record of a woman's life through her name recorded in the textile's threads.

A coverlet displayed in "Weavers & Spinners" features the name of its original owner, Phebe Persons, woven into its bottom corner. Produced for Phebe in 1837, an era in which women rarely made it into the written record, Phebe's coverlet serves as evidence of her life prior to her marriage to Charles Covell.

Spinster is another term whose origins can be found in women's historical role in textile production. Spinster was originally a term used to describe the profession of spinning fibers like wool, flax, and cotton into yarn or thread. Since spinners were almost exclusively women, spinster became a colloquial term for a woman. Eventually, the usage of the term evolved to describe an older, unmarried woman. Today, to call a woman a spinster is considered deeply unflattering.

Those who research family history may be familiar with the term distaff, which refers to the maternal side of a family tree. This term also comes to us from spinning wheels. On a spinning wheel, the distaff is the part of the machine that holds the unspun fiber in place and prevents it from getting tangled and knotted. Distaffs are typically found on spinning wheels used for spinning flax into linen. The flax wheel displayed in "Weavers & Spinners" features a birdcage distaff, which one visitor to the exhibit opening described as resembling a kitchen whisk in appearance. Since spinners were typically women, distaff, like spinster, became a colloquial term for women and the maternal line of a family tree.

The word wife is also said to be related to the word weave due to women's historical role as weavers of homespun cloth. Displayed in the Anderson Gallery at the McHenry County Historical Society is a loom that belonged to the Walkup family of Crystal Lake, on which women of the household likely produced homespun cloth.

Any surplus homespun cloth that women produced could be bartered for other goods a family needed in 19th century McHenry County, which provided wives as weavers with an important way to contribute to the household economy.

Although women feature heavily in textile production, men were involved in the process as well. Men planted and harvested the flax plants that were spun and woven into linen cloth by women. Men also sheared their flock of sheep every spring to harvest the fleece coats which women spun into woolen yarn and thread.

Some men even made careers in the textile arts. Professional weavers were often men. The coverlet produced for Phebe Persons was likely made by a male journeyman weaver. These were skilled craftsmen who lived in a community for weeks or months at a time while completing highly detailed coverlets, like Phebe's, and other textiles on order from locals. Men also made a living as tailors, producing custom clothing for their clients.

Some men even developed skill with a needle and thread over the course of their careers in other arenas. Sailors and soldiers, for instance, frequently sewed and wove by necessity so they could repair worn uniforms, supplies, and ship's sails and netting while deployed in the field or at sea. To learn more about the history of textile production in McHenry County, and to view the objects mentioned in this article, stop by to view "Weavers & Spinners: Usable Textiles in McHenry County," on display through December 27, 2025. ◆

Tailors table and tools

even a "road" at all, but rather the rivers or lakes that cut through the wilderness. In the 18th century our first actual road - the Boston Post Road - was used to deliver mail by horseback between Boston and New York, a trip that took several weeks. During the 19th century, this road was enlarged and smoothed to accommodate stage coaches. Much of the Boston Post Road became U.S. Route #1. Overland travel was so difficult and uncomfortable that the states and federal government actually embarked on a canal building craze before devoting funds to large scale road projects. Better construction methods and materials, as well as the railroad, then doomed the primacy of the canal.

Construction materials evolved from dirt and wooden planks to stone, gravel, brick, and asphalt (from tar pits) by the mid 1800's. Macadamized roads made of layers of crushed and compacted stone came to this country from Scotland in the second quarter of the 19th century. The National Road (aka the Cumberland Road) funded by Congress - despite great opposition - and completed in 1837, was our first truly improved highway. It was a toll road and eventually extended as far west as Illinois. U.S. Route #40 and now Interstate 70 were built over much of the original National Road.

McHenry County

McHenry County was first settled in the mid 1830's primarily by individuals traveling from New York and New England via the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes. By 1837, county government was established and the first commissioners approved eight road districts. Three men were to survey a road "commencing at or near Dr. A. Cornish's [near present day Algonquin] thence running to McHenry, crossing the English Prairie to the north line of said county of McHenry." Another early ordinance directed surveyors to "view and lay off a road to commence at McHenry Village and [run] north to the state line." This would probably be the course of Rt. 31 today. By the time of the Civil War, dirt, plank, and gravel roads crisscrossed the county; most of these followed the exact routes that we travel today.

However, this newspaper article from 1880 humorously described the sad condition of the county's roads:

Only those who have driven over one of those [county] roads can form any idea of a man's feeling as the vehicle plunges and pitches through the mud like a ship in a storm; as the front wheels go down into the dark uncertain depths of a sink hole, he balances himself across the dashboard, his hair stands on end, and as the timbers of the buggy creak and the fragments of harness fly through the air like a hail storm, every little piece of wickedness of his life rises in multitudinous array, magnified by the fear of immediate and terrible dissolution.

This, of course, was written during the pre-automobile age. The advent of the "horseless carriage" would make smoother and safer roads a high priority for local and state governments.

3. Trivia Question -
What is the newest road built in McHenry County?
Answer on page 15.

Good Roads Movement

A concerted effort began in the first decades of the 20th century to improve the nation's roads and highways. The proliferation of automobiles (Henry Ford was producing 1,000,000 Model T's a year by 1921) coupled with new uses for them such as mail delivery or rural school transportation made better roads a requirement. This excerpt from a McHenry County newspaper article entitled "Good Roads Day" gives us a glimpse into the state of the art of road improvement in the early 1900's:

At Woodstock, Illinois, through the efforts of the Business Men's Association, the men went out and raked stones on the roads leading into Woodstock, especially in Greenwood Township, where about twenty miles of very stony road was raked and cleared into excellent shape. The stones on the travelled way which were apt to work loose during the season were loosened with picks and taken out of the road.

In a 1917 news article entitled "Better Roads or No Rural Mail," the Woodstock Sentinel warned rural residents to improve their country roads or risk losing mail service. The Post Office Dept. had recently increased rural routes from 25 miles to 30 miles and many carriers were quitting rather than drive the extra distance on the poor roads. The Sentinel concluded:

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Know Your Roads *Continued from page 5*

Farmers needed good roads to get their crops to market. Author's great uncle, Hans Peterson, in Huntley, 1908

Unless something is done before long, it is predicted the routes will be abbreviated and those who live on impassable roads are pretty sure to have their mail service cut off entirely, is the way the matter is put up by some who profess to know the existent situation.

The school children of America were also enlisted in the fight to improve the nation's roads. In 1913, the U.S. Department of Agriculture actually sponsored a contest for students between the ages of 10 and 15 to write an 800 word essay "on the repair and maintenance of earth [dirt] roads." The winner would receive a gold medal. The department announced that:

Any child between the ages mentioned, attending a country school may compete. Many children living in the rural districts have experienced the disadvantages of roads made impassable through a lack of proper maintenance…

Despite all these efforts, by 1920, of the more than 1,000,000 miles of roads in the United States only about 36,000 (3.6%) had "all weather" surfaces - in other words, those that were suitable for use by automobiles.

By the late 1910's it became obvious that America's highways could not be modernized through local and state efforts alone; Federal help was necessary. In 1916, the Federal Aid Road Act (also known as the Good Roads Act) was enacted into law. This Progressive Era legislation was the first federal highway assistance in the United States. It provided $75,000,000 to the states on a 50-50 basis for road construction. In 1921, this law was amended to encourage the building of interconnected interstate highways.

Inspired by the Good Roads Movement and the brainchild of Carl Fischer (developer of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway), the Lincoln Highway became our first truly transcontinental highway. Begun in 1913, it was promoted as a memorial to President Lincoln, who also championed transportation improvements. Not "completed" until the early 1920's (think World War I intervening) and by then with the use of federal dollars, the Lincoln Highway was never one continuous ribbon of concrete. Rather, it was a patchwork of existing roads stretching 3,300 miles from its starting point in Times Square to its destination in San Francisco. In 1919, a U.S. Army expedition led by a young Colonel Dwight Eisenhower drove the length of the route in the record time of 2 months. Today, U.S. Highway 30 and Interstate 80 are superimposed over much of the original Lincoln Highway. A more enduring monument to the 16th President now sits in Washington D.C. And, of course, Rt. 66, begun in the mid 1920's, far surpassed the Lincoln Highway in American life and lore.

The onset of the Great Depression in 1930 provided another reason to improve the country's roads - jobs for the unemployed. A 1932 McHenry County newspaper article reported the benefit succinctly, "Highway Projects Will Afford Work to Men in County."

4. Trivia Question -
Where is the headquarters of Lincoln Highway Association located?
Answer on page 15.

The Interstate Highway System

Citing his adventure on the Lincoln Highway in 1919 and his observation of Germany's modern autobahns during World War II, now President Eisenhower signed the National Defense Highway Act into law in 1954. This law, ostensibly enacted to facilitate the movement of troops in a national emergency, has had the unforeseen - or, unintended - consequences of fostering the expansion of suburbia; altering where we work, play, and stay; and even changing our eating habits (think the growth of fast food). By the time the original construction of the 40,000 miles of the interstates was completed in 1986, they had

Mail Wagon, MCHS Collection

forever changed the landscape and made many of our earlier roads obsolete - except to the associations of fans who have kept their memory and driving experience alive on remaining sections.

Road ecologists study the additional impact on our nation's wildlife. Ben Goldfarb, in his new book *Crossings,* documents the animal carnage on our high-speed roads. Walter Cronkite once estimated that 350,000,000 birds, animals, reptiles, and rodents are killed on the nation's roads each year. The research of these ecologists has led to the construction of wildlife corridors - a series of tunnels or bridges - that allow for the safe passage of animals across, or under, our busiest highways. In some cases, mortality rates have been cut by 90%.

5. Trivia Question -
Which Interstate passes through a portion of McHenry County?
Answer on page 15.

6. Trivia Question -
What is the only state capitol (other than Hawaii) not served by an Interstate highway?
Answer on page 15.

7. Trivia Question -
Which state is crossed by the most Interstate highways?
Answer on page 15.

Safety and Signs

Of course, as the number of automobiles proliferated the need for road safety, markings, signs, and speed limits arose. The first auto fatality actually occurred in New York City when a man stepped off of a streetcar and into the path of an oncoming car. Connecticut, in 1901, enacted the first state speed limit law - 12 mph in the city and 15 mph in the country. Early speed limits were not only governed by statute but also by the horsepower of the vehicles and the condition of the roads. The subject has always been controversial - freedom vs. safety - but in recent years (after imposing a nationwide 55 mph limit in the 1970's to save energy) the federal government has left speed limits to the individual states.

This excerpt from an April 19,1899 meeting of the Greenwood Township Road Commissioners illustrates the need for road markings and signage:

Contract for graveling road in front of Wm. Walkington's, commence at top of hill, go south across the bridge and to the second little hill, also road through a hollow (about 20 Rd. [rods]) West of Barnard's Corner and also about 25 rods of road North of the Garrison bridge..."

A McHenry County newspaper in July, 1901 also pled the case for road signs:

It is a frequent occurrence that we hear persons remark on the absence of signboards at the intersection of country roads. Persons not well acquainted with the roads, and who enjoy driving through the rural precincts, note their absence with regret... Let a signboard at every crossing be the motto.

Henry Petroski in *The Road Taken* quotes the August, 1919 issue of the *Highway Magazine:*

Signs are the voices of the highway. They tell the traveler where he should go; how fast he may travel; and when he must be aware of danger.

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Know Your Roads *Continued from page 7*

Road Work in Hebron 1930's MCHS file

Without signs the road is silent, unknown, and menacing.

According to Eric Sloane, author of *Our Vanishing Landscape*, the earliest road signs were markings on trees or telegraph poles: a skull & crossbones, for example, might signal a dangerous intersection or hill. Petroski reports that in 1917 New England states began color coding their roads: red for an east-west route, blue for north-south, and yellow for diagonal roads. At the same time Wisconsin began using numbered route markers on a distinctive shaped sign. This corrected the problem of a plethora of "named roads," i.e. many used the same name. In January, 1923 Illinois pioneered a "New System in Road Marking" that promised to give this state "the best marked highways in the world." By 1925, the American Association of State Highway Officials declared that major routes had to be known primarily by numbers: roads crossing state lines would have a shield, those within a state, a circular map.

Numbering

Also, in the mid-1920's state highway commissioners decided that east-west roads would use even numbers (think Rt. 14) and north-south roads received odd numbers, e.g. Rt. 23. Main highways would be numbered under 100 and the most important routes would end with a zero (think Rt. 20 or Rt. 30). Furthermore, the numbers would increase as you moved from north to south and east to west. For example, east-west highway #2 travels near the Canadian border and highway #98 along the Gulf of Mexico (or, should I say, the Gulf of America?). Highway #1 (the old Boston Post Road) runs near the Atlantic Ocean and Highway #101 is also known as the Pacific Coast Highway.

When the Interstate Highways were built the numbering order was reversed so as not to create confusion. East-west roads still carry even numbers and north-south odd, but now the highest number is near the Canadian border (I-94) and the lowest near the Gulf Coast (I-10). Similarly, I-95 runs from New England to Florida and I-5 from Washington state to the Mexican border. Three-digit numbers are designated for city bypasses.

Color and Lines

Some reference has already been made to sign color. Under Illinois' new 1923 law there would be 3 sign categories: "Look," in green meant proceed with proper care; "Caution," in yellow, signified proceed with greater care; and "Danger," in red, was to be used at railroad crossings and sharp curves. Prior to the opening of the Interstate Highway System, federal and state authorities experimented with a number of different sign colors and lettering to determine the most visible to high-speed motoring. This resulted in the familiar large green signs with white lettering in a new typeface known as "Clearview." Blue and brown colors were chosen for rest areas and tourist attractions, respectively, as they were thought to be softer colors and less distracting.

As early as the Roman Empire white stones were used to separate lanes of chariot traffic in hopes - probably futile - of avoiding accidents. However, according to Petroski, rural roads in America lacked any markings at all as late as 1917, with results easily predictable. Crosswalks, however, were painted on streets in New York City as early as 1911. An 1883 novel, *A Far Look Ahead,* actually predicted an electric vehicle that could travel at the unheard of speed of 20 miles an hour and keep to the right of "the white line running along the centre of the road."

In 1911, Edward Hines, a member of the Wayne County, Michigan Road Commission, observed a milk wagon leaking its contents and leaving a white stripe behind it. According to Petroski, this gave him the idea for our now

universal center line. The first white center line actually painted on a rural highway came in 1917 on a strip of the Marquette-Negaunee Road in the Upper Peninsula. This stretch of road, known as Dead Man's Curve, was particularly dangerous as motorists had a habit of "cutting corners."

The result was an immediate reduction in accidents.

Rustic Roads and Scenic Roads

Wisconsin established a "Rustic Roads" program to honor its roads (1) having outstanding natural features along its borders, (2) that are lightly traveled access roads, (3) are not scheduled for major improvements, and (4) are at least two miles long. Such roads may be dirt, gravel, or paved and have a maximum speed of 45 miles per hour. They have unique brown and yellow signs accompanied with an R and three-digit number. Currently, there are 126 Rustic Roads in Wisconsin with 7 in Walworth County, our neighbor to the north.

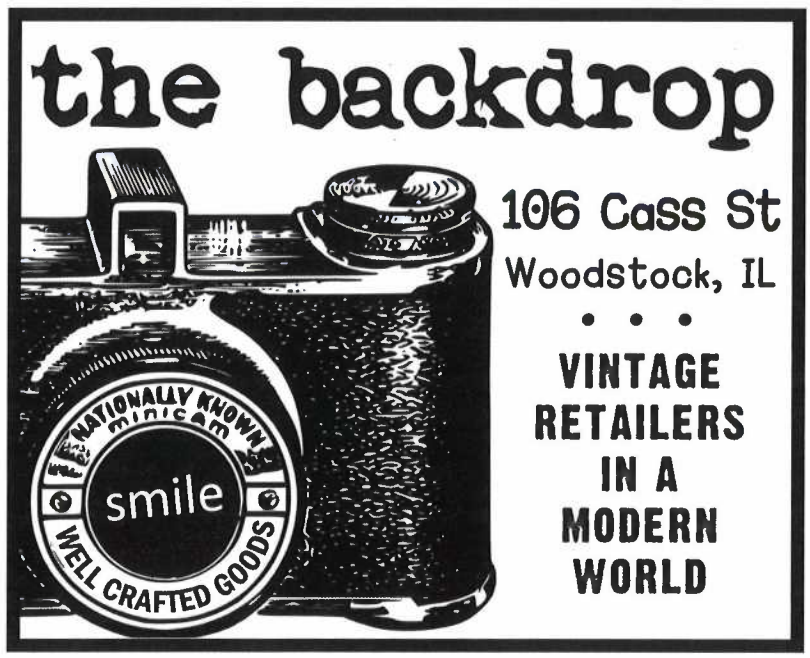
8. Trivia Questions -
How many Scenic Drives does McHenry County have?
Answer on page 15.

McHenry County has a "Scenic Streets and Roads" program to "distinguish rural roads and vistas for future generations ... ." The stated purpose of this plan is to promote (1) a sense of place, including community identity and quality of life, (2) resource preservation, (3) economic development, and (4) recreation. The county highway department in conjunction with the McHenry County Preservation Commission administers the program. Our Scenic Roads feature a familiar brown sign with white lettering.

In addition to the books already mentioned in this article, two new road books that I would recommend are:

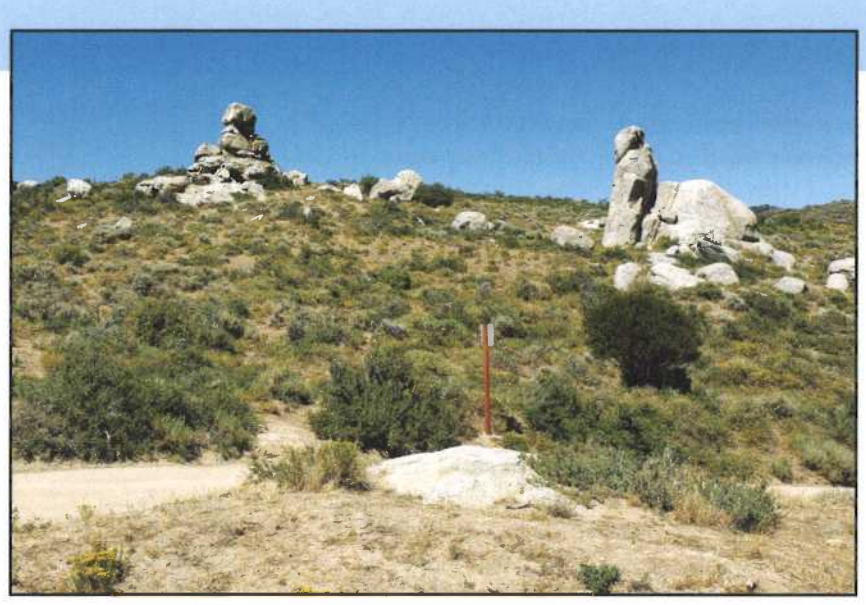
Back Roads and Better Angels; A Journey Into the Heart of American Democracy by Francis S. Barry (Steerforth Press, 2024). A couple travel the length of the Lincoln Highway by RV to better understand the origins and meaning of our democracy today.

On Freedom Road by David Goodrich (Pegasus Books, 2023). Bicyclists travel the eastern and western routes of the Underground Railroad on two wheels. ◆



Humbolt Mountain Massacre

by Ed Urban
Board Member and Civil War Expert



Back in 2019 I wrote on this topic for the *Marengo-Union Times*, and at that time the only information I possessed about this incident was an article that was published in the November 20, 1850, issue of the *Illinois Daily Journal*. I closed that story with, "Somewhere out there in the stacks of old newspapers, government records, or family bibles there has to be more information; it's just buried and not readily available. Hopefully, someday more information will be discovered to offer a more complete picture of what really happened to Anderson, Stewart, Barnes, and Soule on the California Trail."

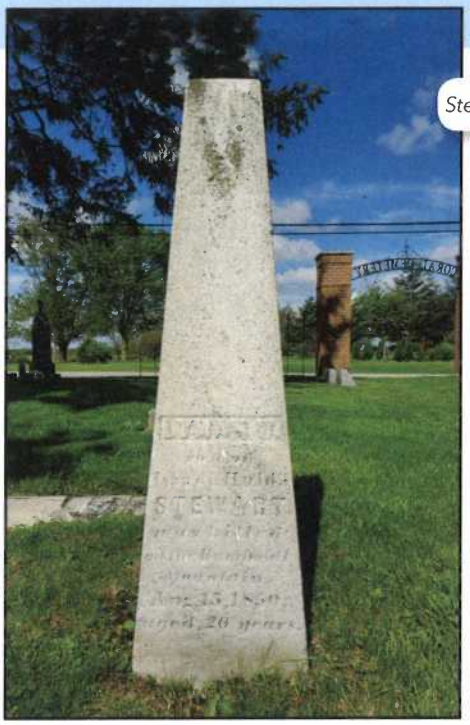
Well, it wasn't too long afterwards that I received an email from Professor Richard Rieck, retired from Western Illinois University, who saw my story, and he was able to provide information that helped complete the picture of what happened to the four McHenry County men at Harrison Pass in Nevada. It's worth mentioning at this point that Professor Rieck is an authority on the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails. He has written articles on the subject, and has contributed to the four-part series, *The Great Medicine Road*, published in 2020 by the University of Oklahoma Press.

After gold was discovered in 1848 in California's Sacramento Valley an intense wave of excitement spread eastward sparing no town or city in its wake. McHenry County was not immune from this feverish contagion to get rich. Two examples of this appeared in *The Prairie Plain Speaker*, in the form of letters written by county residents to friends or family in the east. In one letter dated March 4, 1849, Coral resident Maria Seward wrote about the Gold Rush, "They {sic} are a great many people going from about the vicinity..." Maria also informed her friend," Pa says tell you there is a great chance to buy land now so many are going to California. Old Mr. Brown is going and offers his farm for $10 per acre." [1]

The second letter was written by Alden resident Lucinda Bills to her aunt in Ohio in 1851. Bills wrote, "There has been a great California excitement her for two years past, but I think it is done, for some of our neighbors are there and cannot get back one man has just returned by begging his way through the States." In closing the letter, Bills painted a bleak picture of the cost that the Gold Rush had on McHenry County, "There was such an excitement that farms have been mortgaged which can never be redeemed and the county drained of money which will never be returned from California all for gold. Some left families others took them along and have buried them on the route." [2]

The exact date that Lyman Stewart, Kendrick Anderson, and William Barnes left McHenry County is not known, but it can be assumed that it was sometime in April of 1850, because several local parties left for California in that month. Benjamin Soule left Wisconsin on April 4, 1850, with another party and at some point, along the California Trail, he joined the McHenry County group.[3] The trip to the gold fields was an arduous several month journey, and very little is known about the men's day-to-day experience on the trek west until they reached Harrison Pass in Nevada on August 15, 1850.

From that point their ordeal is chronicled in a diary written by an anonymous author from Fayette County, Ohio. The Fayette County, Ohio, wagon train also arrived in the vicinity of Harrison Pass on the 15th and camped at the base of the mountain. In the diary the pass is referred to as "the gap." On August 16th the Fayette diarist, and three men who he identified as Sam Millikan, Jeffres, and Hedrick split from the train and went through the pass. Millikan was identified as the group's hunter, and it is possible that the small party went out hunting. Later in the day the group split up and Jeffres and Hedrick returned to the wagon train, and the diarist and Millikan continued forward. At around sundown Millikan noticed a piece of paper near the road, and they discovered that it was a note warning travelers that there was Indian activity in the area, and that the Indians intended to kill any white men they found in small parties. The diarist wrote that the note "stired [sic] us up." The two men continued to move and eventually noticed a light and walked towards it. When they arrived at


Stewart Side

Anderson Side

the source of the light, they were relieved that it was the camp of a party of "some old friends," where they spent the night. [4]

The following morning, they learned that four or five men had been killed by Indians the previous day in the pass, and one was fortunate to have escaped the massacre. This man, who was identified as Naylor, was in camp with the wagon train. As the train was preparing to continue its westward journey another man came into camp with the news that a group of Indians was camped about five miles from their location with thirty horses which were taken from emigrants on the trail. This news riled up the men in the wagon train, and a party of twenty men was raised to give the Indians "a fight" and take back the horses. Naylor volunteered to join this group, and on the way to meet the Indians he told the story of how Barnes, Anderson, and Stewart met their demise.

Naylor and five other men were on the trail with pack mules when they came upon the pass, and decided to go through because it would provide a shorter route. Soon the party encountered an Indian camp; they found the Indians to be friendly. Barnes offered the Indians his gun in exchange for a mule, and the trade was made. After several other items were bartered the Indians pointed out the trail and party continued with the Indians following them. Barnes stopped by a stream to fill his canteen and one of the Indians shot him with the gun that he had just traded away. The Indians then "raised the yell" and opened fire on the men. Soule, the Wisconsin resident, was shot in the back with an arrow. Naylor attempted to flee the mayhem on foot, he was running next to the mare that Anderson was riding when Anderson was shot in the back of the neck, and the bullet exited under his chin. Anderson fell from the horse and Naylor jumped on the animal and fled the scene with three Indians chasing him. As he was fleeing the area he saw that Stewart and the fifth man had stopped and were pleading for their lives.[5] This fifth man was identified as Charles Ralls from Canada in an article written a few months after the incident.[6]

The party eventually came upon the bodies of the four men, briefly examined the scene and moved on in search of the Indians. Eventually ten men split from the group and returned to bury the bodies. The bodies had been badly mutilated, stripped naked and left to the mercy of the elements. Like many emigrants before them, and many more after them, the four men were interred in graves along the desolate trail echoing the closing words of Lucinda Ball's letter.

The two parties reunited towards evening and eventually encountered a group of Indians in camp. This encounter led to a battle, and the Fayette diarist recorded that the "arrows flew thick and fast on one side, while the other rolled in lead." The battle continued, and as the sun sank towards the horizon the Indians retreated leaving several dead warriors on the battle ground. The men searched the Indian camp and found the ramrod to Barnes' gun and his knife along with other items belonging to the murdered men. The horses were not recovered.[7]

Today Harrison Pass is still desolate and the road leading to it is gravel. There is still a trail in the area, the Ruby Crest trail, but it's used by recreational hikers. As far as gold goes, I had a conversation with several locals at a bar in Jiggs, Nevada, about 13 miles northwest of the pass, and they're convinced it's still there and they are actively hunting for it. As for Stewart, Anderson, and Barnes, they're remembered by only a few people, and more people will know their story after this article is published. Stewart and Anderson are memorialized by a cenotaph in the Coral Township Cemetery, but Barnes is only a memory in historic records. ◆

1. The Prairie Plain Speaker, VOL. IV, Issue 1, page 1, McHenry County Historical Society
2. Letter from Lucinda Bills to Rebecca Green, January 10, 1851, McHenry County Historical Society, Gold Rush Information file
3. Burlington Free Press, September 5, 1906, page 8
4. Anonymous, (Fayette County Boys) 1849, Ohio to California, Oregon California Trails Association, Merrill J. Mattes Collection: 13
5. Anonymous, 14
6. Iowa Democratic Enquirer, November 23, 1850, 2
7. Anonymous, 14-15

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Director's Corner

by Jolie Diepenhorst

Recognition and Responsibility: Receiving the Ward Family Prize

Has anyone ever asked you what public history is? I have answered that question at least one hundred times over the last ten years. But what is public history really?

Public history is the practice of bringing history into public spaces. Generally, when people think about history, they often picture high school history teachers, memorable school trips to places like Washington, D.C., or parts of history that resonate with them. For instance, I have a deep appreciation for Revolutionary War History and own many books on the subject. But are these examples of public history?

When I consider public history in practice, I think of community engagement. Our curator, Siobhan, might focus on incorporating specific subjects into exhibits, while the MCHS librarians might think about managing archives, special book collections, or conducting research. In any case, it's all about making history accessible to the community.

I mention this because my alma mater recently invited me to apply for the Ward Family Prize in Public History. The University of Colorado, Denver grants this award to a graduate who has significantly contributed to public history through various activities.

I had to look back at my history to determine if I could meet the requirements. I was able to check all the boxes: including curating museum exhibits, leading historic site tours, preserving historic buildings and artifacts, conducting oral history projects, producing documentaries, podcasts, or digital history content, advising public policy or heritage conservation, writing for popular audiences in books, magazines, or online platforms, and publishing works. So, I applied.

I am thrilled to share that I won the Ward Family Prize for Public History!

But I promise I won't let it go to my head. I will continue to bring you, our members and biggest supporters, great public programming, fun, engaging partnerships, and I will continue to support the work of my wonderful colleagues and staff every day to bring public history to you. We are dedicated to the history of this place, and we are just getting started! ◆

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Courtesy of Library of Congress.

Major Lenox Riley Lohr

by Nancy Baker
Board Member/Author/Former Planner Woodstock

Author's note: Almost 40 years ago, I attended a Sampler Series program presented by Historical Society member and former president Shuji Kimura about McHenry County residents who became nationally famous. Shuji was a gifted speaker who had his audience laughing and singing as he told stories about a diverse group of famous residents. Over the years, I have become aware of other names that could be added to a list of "who was who" in McHenry County including that of Major Lenox Riley Lohr.

Lenox Riley Lohr was born in 1891 in Washington D.C. He was a cousin to John Philip Sousa. He received a degree in mechanical engineering from Cornell University and was then commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers. He served in World War I as part of the American Expeditionary Forces and received a silver star for gallantry in the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

In 1924, Lohr married Josephine Winsatt who had received an M.D. from John Hopkins University. In June, 1928, Lohr was promoted to major and was referred to as Major Lohr throughout the rest of his life.

Major Lohr stayed in the Army after the war. He taught engineering at West Point, was involved with various projects including the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and was appointed Executive Secretary of the Society of Military Engineers and editor of the journal *The Military Engineer.* The president of the Society of Military Engineers at that time was General Charles G. Dawes who was also serving as the Vice President of the United States [during the Coolidge administration]. Dawes was from Evanston, Illinois and had many business and financial interests in the Midwest.

In 1928, Charles Dawes and his brother Rufus, key organizers and financial backers of the Century of Progress world's fair, convinced Lohr to leave Washington D.C. and move to Chicago to manage The Fair. Lohr resigned his commission in January of 1929 and in May of 1929 he was officially appointed General Manager. Overseeing a World's Fair would have been very challenging in the best of times, but the Century of Progress was constructed and opened in the depths of the Great Depression. Major Lohr brought his organizational techniques and military efficiency to the project and not only did the Century of Progress exceed all expectations, it was even profitable. The Century of Progress opened on time in May 1933 and closed in the fall of 1934.

At the same time, Lohr also joined the Naval Reserve and held the rank of Lt. Commander from 1929-1941. Both the Army and the Navy awarded him Distinguished Civilian medals.

In 1934, Lenox Lohr purchased the Willis Kittle farm on Barreville Road in Nunda Township. The farm is now part of the McHenry County Conservation District's Stickney Run conservation site. Charles Allen, who had worked on the Century of Progress, managed operations for Lohr and he and his wife lived in a house on the property. Lohr, his wife, and their five children stayed in a cottage located in the large grove of oak trees and had plans to build a larger home. A flagpole from the Century of Progress was erected near the cottage. *The McHenry Plaindealer* reported that several men were employed repairing and improving buildings, erecting fences, and constructing a gravel driveway. In 1935, neighbors were entertained with Lohr's brilliant display of fireworks on the Fourth of July.

Major Lohr was interested in the wildlife on the property, and it was reported that he intended to turn at least part of it into a game preserve. In the meantime, he made a collection of each type of game on the farm, having them stuffed and mounted. *The McHenry Plaindealer* noted that the orchard which had been planted by previous owners, the Mosgroves, whose family cemetery was located in a corner of the orchard, was replanted and the creek was dammed to form a three acre lake

Continued on page 14

which was stocked with fish from the Spring Grove State Fish Hatchery.

In 1936, Lenox Lohr accepted a job as president of the NBC Radio company in New York and he and his family moved to Tarrytown, New York and the farm was sold to Leon Hepplethwaite of Evanston. As president of NBC, Lohr oversaw the company's earliest television broadcasts.

The November 1939 issue of Popular Science magazine included a five page photo intensive article about Lenox Lohr's many hobbies. He solved magic tricks and psychic illusion, had elaborate woodworking and machine shops and an electrical laboratory in the basement of his home. He repaired old firearms, built boats, produced movies, and collected stamps, guns, butterflies, ancient playing cards and mint patterns of U.S. coins. In outbuildings on the estate he raised ducks, chickens, pheasants and wild turkeys. He even added a pair of black bear cubs from Maine.

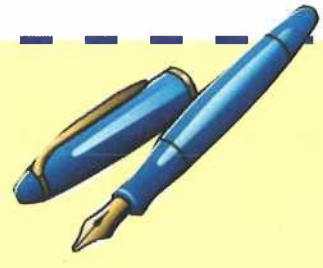
In 1940, Major Lohr returned to Chicago to take over the position of president of the financially failing Museum of Science and Industry. Lohr proceeded to dismiss the museum director, curators and some other staff members and took on the job of museum director himself. Prior to Lohr, the museum's focus on the history of industry and exhibits did not attract return visitors. He changed the focus to current and emerging science and technology with an emphasis on interactive exhibits and moving parts. He brought in corporations to construct and operate their own exhibits, and turned the museum into a national and international showplace. Though he eventually hired a director, Lohr continued as president until his death in 1968.

Lenox and Josephine Lohr raised their five children in the mansion they purchased in Evanston in 1940 and remained there for the rest of their lives, but they also returned to McHenry County where they had a modest home on Island Lake.

The list of Lohr's civic and charitable involvement is long. He served in leadership positions on the boards of hospitals, colleges, research foundations, and charities. He served as the president of the 1948-49 Chicago Railroad Fair which celebrated the 100th anniversary of the first railroad in Chicago. He chaired financing for the restoration of the Jane Addams Hull House, and was the first vice president of the Chicago Educational Television Association, sponsor of WTTW public television channel 11, which had a working studio in the Museum of Science and Industry. Lenox Lohr organized and directed the first Illinois State Civil Defense agency from 1950-1953, and he served as Chairman of the Illinois Higher Education Commission from 1954-1959.

And yes, in 1948 and 1949, the *Crystal Lake Herald* reported that Lenox Lohr was the president of the Island Lake Property Owners Association. ◆

Tracer Reader Survey



To help us improve, please take time to provide your thoughtful responses.

Please email Jolie Diepenhorst: jolie@mchenrycountyhistory.org

1. When I get my Tracer, I read:

A. 10% (a quick skim)
B. 30% (not too much)
C. 60-90% (most of it)
D. 100% (cover to cover)

2. Page design and content amount:

A. Good
B. Fair
C. Poor

3. Rank these features from 1-8:
1 most useful, 8 least useful

A. Board Meetings
B. Collection & Gallery Exhibits
C. County History & Progress
D. Family History Stories
E. Research Library Updates
F. Someone You Should Know
G. Staff Columns
H. Upcoming Events

4. Additional Comments

Let us know what you think.

Welcome To Our New Members

Ernest Vasseur
Craig Mueller
Michael Sedola
Kathy Slover
Susan Weaver
Susan Jung
Darrell & Pamela Kampwerth
Keven & Kathleen Weisenberger
Betty Thomas
Donna Hriljac
Mike Gallery
The Backdrop
Jackie Wojt
Michael & Melinda Rhodes
Michale Kearney
Sue Skowronski
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Lance Kittelson
Tom & Kerry Cichowski
Thomas Wright
Marcie J Williams
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Lisa Krchak
Ders Anderson
Eric Hanson
Bill Howenstine
Wally & Karen Jasonowicz
Cindy Shadle
Susanne Porcher
Marcie J. Williams

Trivia Answers

1. Trivia Question
Who sang "Get Your Kicks on Rt. 66?"
Nat King Cole sang "Get Your Kicks on Route 66."

2. Trivia Question
Where does Rt. 66 begin?
Route 66 begins in Chicago.

3. Trivia Question
What is the newest road built in McHenry County?
Rakow Road, built in the 1990's is the newest road in the county.

4. Trivia Question
Where is the headquarters of Lincoln Highway Association located?
The Lincoln Highway Assoc. is headquartered in Franklin Grove, IL.

5. Trivia Question
Which Interstate passes through a portion of McHenry County?
I-90 crosses the southwest part of McHenry County.

6. Trivia Question
What is the only state capitol (other than Hawaii) not served by an Interstate highway?
Pierre, South Dakota, is the only state capitol not on an Interstate.

7. Trivia Question
Which state is crossed by the most Interstate highways?
Illinois is criss-crossed by 11 Interstate Highways.

8. Trivia Questions
How many Scenic Drives does McHenry County have?
McHenry County has 11 Scenic Drives.

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Spring and Summer Programs

May 21 – Our Nippersink Lecture 6:00-7:00 PM
May 23 – Kayak the Kish 3:00-6:00 PM
May 31 – Fabrics of our Lives Lecture & Workshop 11:00 AM & 1:30 PM
June 7 – Frontiers to Freedom McHenry County 1830-1865 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM
June 10 – Tuesdays with Tots 10:00 AM- 11:00 AM
June 14 – Mount Thabor Cemetery Tours 9:00 AM- 11:00 AM
June 14 – Roots & Branches – Tracing Your Family History 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
June 21 – Paddle Through Time on the Nippersink 9:00 AM- 3:00 PM
June 22 – Usonian Visions: A Lecture & Tour Through Wright's Midwest Homes 11:00 AM - 2:30 PM
June 28 – Community Conversations: A Taste of Home- Sharing Recipes and Stories 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
July 8 – Tuesdays with Tots 10:00AM – 11:00AM
July 13 – Heritage Fair 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM
July 19 – Community Conversations: From Braceros to Business Owners 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
July 26 – Linen's Journey: From Seed to Shirt 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM